



CAMAS HIGH School's football team of 1937, under the guidance of head coach Walt Erickson and the dynamic running of captain Don Gigler, compiled an unbeaten record and upset both Salem, Ore., and Vancouver in stunning victories. (Photo courtesy of Hugh Knapp)

CHAMPS!

1937 Camas team tackled major championship

The biggest was only 172 pounds. The smallest was 123 pounds. They were the giants of an era.

During the 1937 football season, the Camas High School Papermakers stunned the region with a season that was rife with upsets, high scores, innovative equipment and a Cinderella ending to an undefeated season.

Led by the diminutive Don Gigler, a 123-pound halfback, the Papermakers climaxed an unforgettable season with a triumph over rival Fort Vancouver on a wet, muddy Thanksgiving day.

It was a fitting finale to a season of triumphs and upsets that began with 47-0 shutout of the Chemawa Indians and went through nine more contests that culminated in one editorial writer bestowing the Papermakers with the title — Oregon High School Champion.

In those days schedules were flexible, often altered in midseason if a better game came along. And Camas took on the likes of Hood River, Hillsboro, St. Helens, Grant and Chemawa as well as Woodland, Hillsboro, Kelso, Washougal and Vancouver.

The 1937 Papermakers won all but

the game with Grant. But that loss was considered by many to be a practice game, not to be considered when compiling season statistics. Statistics that included 238 points scored by the Papermaker offense while holding the opposition to 71, 33 of which were scored against the reserves.

Gigler, the captain of the squad, rolled up a total of 136 points to lead the Class A, by more than twice the points scored by any other player in the division, and second in the state. In fact, Gigler missed the Hillsboro game, and had he played it's possible he would have been the state scoring leader.

Gigler carried the ball for 21 touchdowns and added another 10 conversions.

Yet none of the touchdowns by Gigler, has lived in the annals of history as long or with as much emphasis as the final time he carried the ball for Camas High School.

In the final game of the season against Fort Vancouver, he scored on an 80-yard punt return that clinched victory for the powerful Papermakers.

As reported by Carl Brazier, Jr. of The Columbian: "You've read about

such things in story books and seen them in motion pictures — and you didn't believe it. You've heard all season about the exploits of a bit of a football player named Don Gigler — and you probably didn't believe half you read.

"But if you were up at Camas yesterday you came home with a couple of new ideas, for it was the self-same Gigler who, in the most brilliant, most spectacular and most unexpected play of the southwest Washington high school football season, won the Camas-Vancouver game for Camas after the game officially had ended."

Taking the punt on the 20-yard line, and with just seconds remaining in the game that Vancouver led 14-12, Gigler "wiggled his way up the sidelines, through one would-be tackler after another, crossed the Vancouver 40-yard line as the gun went off and then kept on going to cross the Trapper goal line standing up and give Camas the game, 18-14."

During the age of the 30s, there wasn't such a thing as a clock to tell the players how much time remained in the game. It was a time when football was emerging from leather helmets and archaic rules, evolving

into the game of today.

State-of-the-art equipment included plastic helmets with sponge rubber inserts, kangaroo-skin shoes and two-piece football pants. There were even optional face masks, although most members of the 1937 team preferred to play without the new fangled devices.

Today, players shuffle off and on the field after each play, delivering instructions and giving their teammates a breather. In 1937, if a player left the field, he wasn't allowed to return for the remainder of the quarter.

The game has evolved. As has the equipment. The players are bigger and the training regimen has helped provide additional safety through improved conditioning. Yet much has been learned from those early days of prep football, and from the innovative techniques of coach Walt Erickson. Playing against single-wing offenses, Erickson devised a double-wing system with reverses, double reverses, triple reverses, triples with a forward pass and plays with a forward pass and lateral.

Today's football is exciting, but in 1937 it was, as one editorial writer reported, 'spectacular.'